

LESSON 3E—NARRATIVE: HOW WAS ANCIENT ART CREATED?

*Ancient people used technology to
create art to express themselves.*

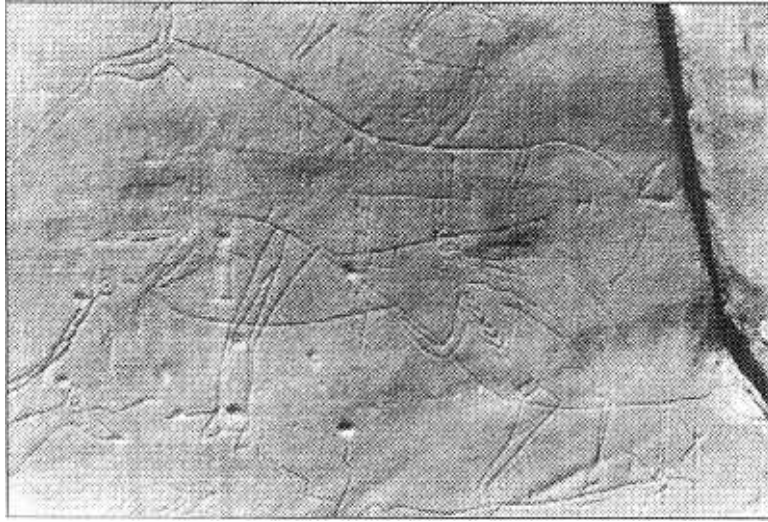
When

a modern-day billboard printed with messages for all to see. Others think rock art is more **symbolic**, expressing spiritual and **supernatural** beliefs of ancient people. In North America, rock art is not a true writing system. It does not contain words and cannot be read like Egyptian **hieroglyphics**. Archaeologists study rock art figures, and sometimes patterns emerge. Often a particular rock art style will appear only in a certain region. In central Montana, the rock art images found along the Smith River are believed to be related to religious activities. Many Indian tribes have oral traditions about prehistoric rock art and its spiritual meaning.

Rock art in Montana includes many different kinds of designs. Some



Handprints are a common pictograph motif in central and western Montana rock art. Sometimes they were drawn, and other times, they represent actual hands dipped in red ochre paint. These handprints at the Black Canyon site are actual handprints and show left and right hands, some in pairs. *Mavis and John Greer, photographers.*



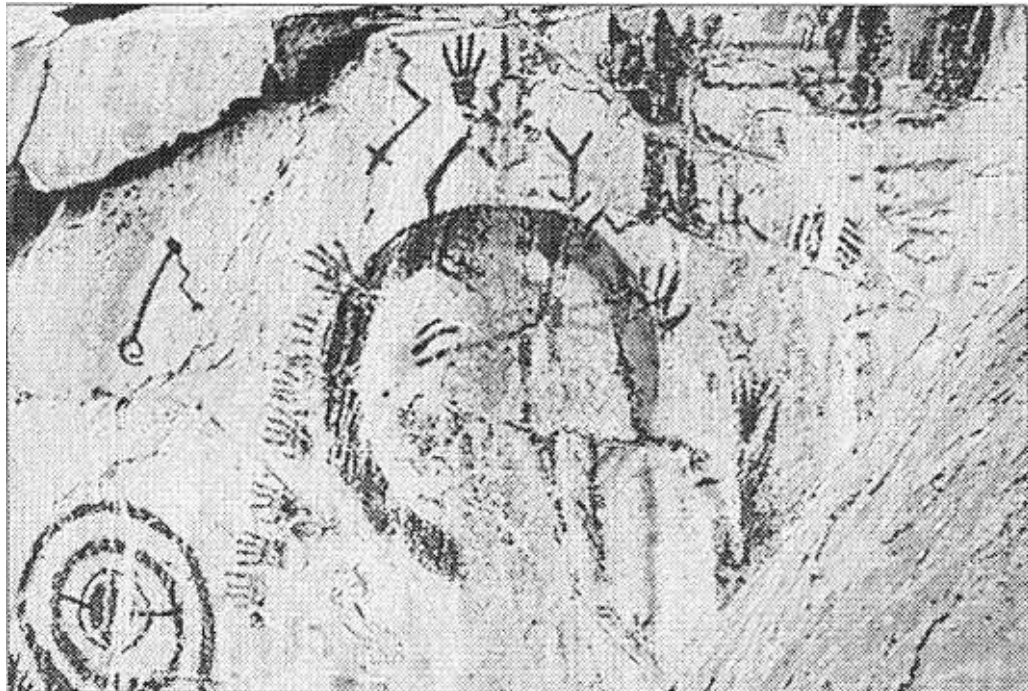
There are two basic kinds of rock art: pictographs (painted images) and petroglyphs (carved images). This petroglyph of warriors on horseback is in the biographical style that became common in the Protohistoric Period. *Edrie Vinson, photographer. Courtesy Montana Historical Society.*

of these designs depict animals and people, while others are abstract. Images of animals—bears, snakes, birds, lizards, turtles, sheep, otter, deer and elk—appear on many rock art panels. Paintings of handprints, animal tracks, and perhaps **clan symbols** (either animal or geometric) may have served to identify a prehistoric group and possibly its **territory**. Throughout Montana and much of the world, ancient rock art typically

depicts humans engaged in the act of hunting with bows and arrows, spears, or atlatls. But in some areas like central Montana, these scenes are absent. Instead, abstract drawings of humans appear. Some of these figures have horns and headdresses and others are shown without arms, hands, or legs. These are believed to be the drawings of a **shaman**. Shamans were ancient religious leaders who gained power through painting or carving special images. In fact, some of the images believed to be painted by shamans were placed on cracks in the rock. The position of these images may represent the passage of the shaman from or into another spirit world.

Based on scientific dating, the oldest rock art in Montana is two thousand years old. In contrast, early rock art in Europe—which displays extinct animals such as mammoth and bison—is thirty thousand years old. The most recent Montana rock art

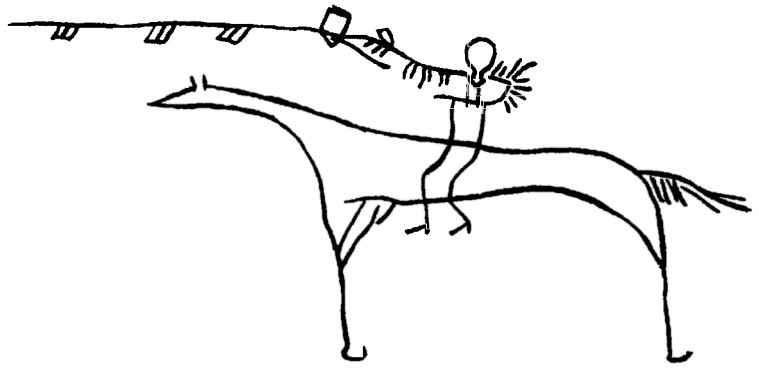
At some rock art sites, many different designs may occur and overlap each other. This suggests that they were made at different times. Here, at the Rock Creek Pictograph Site, you can see paintings of shields, handprints, and human stick figures. What else do you see? *Mavis and John Greer, photographers.*



shows images of horses and guns and appears to record special historical events. This **biographical style** of rock art became common between 1750 and 1900. During this time, the lives of Native Americans were changing rapidly due to the introduction of horses, guns, and other new items by Euro-American explorers and traders. Montana's Indians drew many scenes showing warfare, horse stealing, **counting coup**, and dancing, as well as hunting, during this time of major cultural change.

Ancient people used liquid paints and solid crayons to create their pictographs. They made crayons from raw **pigment**. Pigment in Montana was derived mostly from charcoal or from locally obtained **hematite**, or hardened red clay earth. To make paint, ancient artists ground these and other minerals into a powder. Then they mixed the powder with animal fat until it was very sticky. Besides red and black, Montana rock paintings sometimes include yellow, brown, and green colors. Though many people think pictographs were painted with brushes of animal hair, they were mostly painted using fingers and hands.

Ancient artists carved the lines of petroglyphs with pointed stone tools or



antler tines. Sometimes evidence of pecking with a rock, like a hammer-stone, is seen. Most petroglyphs are found on sandstone, which is softer and smoother than other kinds of rock.

Rock art sites that can be viewed by the public include those found at Missouri Headwaters State Park near Three Forks, at Pictograph Cave State Park southeast of Billings, and at Pompey's Pillar along the Yellowstone River. Remember, rock art is very fragile and vulnerable to touching and scratching. Never trace the rock art with chalk or crayons, even if you want to get a better picture of it with your camera. Many rock art sites are sacred to modern-day Indians. Look and enjoy, but do not touch these ancient and fragile images.

Some rock art can be dated by the type of images portrayed. This depiction of a person on horseback carrying a gun tells us that it was made sometime after A.D. 1700, when these items—the horse and the gun—were first acquired by Montana's native people. *Courtesy Montana Historical Society.*

LESSON 3E—VOCABULARY: HOW WAS ANCIENT ART CREATED?

biographical style _____

clan symbol _____

counting coup _____

hematite _____

hieroglyphics _____

petroglyphs _____

pictographs _____

pigment _____

rock art _____

shaman _____

supernatural _____

symbolic _____

territory _____

LESSON 3E—ARCH ACTIVITY: ANCIENT ARTISTS

Grades: 3-8

Time: 45 minutes

Content Area: science, communication,
writing, and arts

Who: whole class and small groups

Materials:

paper (or rocks)

pencils

markers

rock art images

Arch Journal

OBJECTIVE AND OUTCOME

- Students will learn about prehistoric symbols.

- Students will create their own rock art panel and interpret others' panels.

- Students will gain an understanding of the need to protect rock art for the future.

- Students will write a radio commercial for protection of rock art.

ACTIVITY

1. Discuss with students the meaning of the words pictograph, petroglyph, and rock art (see narrative). Explain that they will create a pictograph during this activity.

2. Give each student a piece of paper. Have them use pencils and

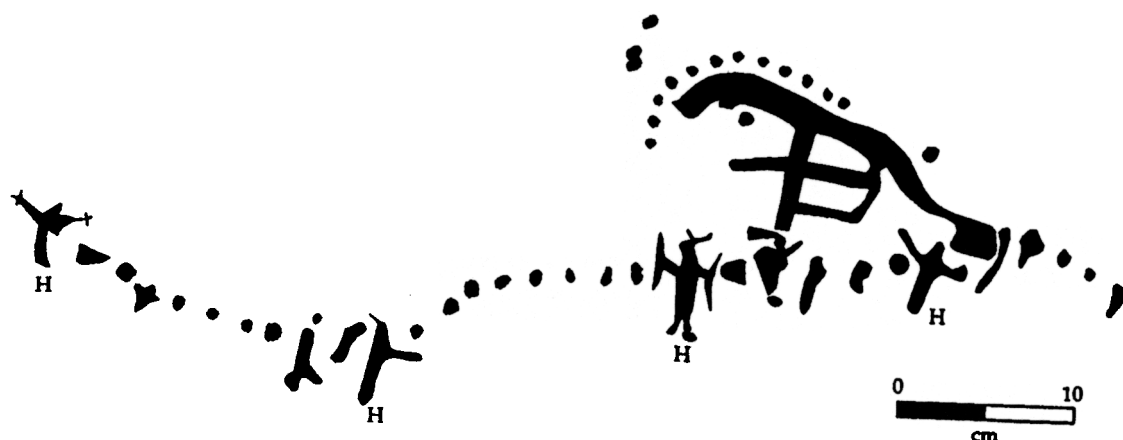
color markers to create a single or simple set of symbols that tell a story of some event that happened to them. Have students imagine that this event happened to them 2,000 years ago. As an alternative, have them design a symbol that represents themselves or some other object. Ask the students to use symbols as if they were living 2,000 years ago.

3. Give students 10 minutes to make their "pictograph." When they are finished, have them trade with a partner and try to "read" each other's stories or interpret their partner's symbol.

4. As a class, discuss what clues people used to decipher the symbols.

5. Project the rock art images from the Red Bluff Cave on the Smith River

Rock art at Red Bluff Cave, Meagher County, Montana.



on a transparency. Tell students that archaeologists are not sure what these images mean, but that they think the symbols labeled with an "H" represent humans. Ask students, after they have viewed the symbols, to write answers to the following questions:

~ What do you think the symbols mean?

~ Why did people create them?

~ Is there a message in the symbols? What is it?

~ What can archaeologists learn from studying these images?

~ What information would be lost if they were destroyed?

6. With their partners, have students write a 40-second radio commercial to promote the protection of rock art. Then have each team present its commercial to the class.

EXTENSIONS

3–5:

- Research vocabulary.

See: Lesson 3E—Vocabulary

- Complete this activity using finger paint or natural materials the students bring from home instead of pencils and markers.

6–8:

- Challenge students to read an article about rock art.

- Challenge students to learn about how rock art can be dated.